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## **Regional Environmental Overview Central America, March 1999**

### **1 Overview**

The Central American countries are actively addressing environmental issues under the banner of the "Alliance for Sustainable Development", adopted by the region's national leaders in August 1994. The Alliance, which is also concerned with political, moral, economic and social issues, constitutes an integrated strategy, and a set of national commitments, aimed at making the Central American isthmus a region of peace, democracy and sustainable development. U.S. Vice President Gore was invited to witness the signing of the Alliance, and spoke at the subsequent Managua Summit.

In the months following the birth of the Alliance, Central American experts and U.S. government officials crafted the "Declaracion Conjunta Centroamerica-USA" (CONCAUSA), which was signed at the Miami Summit of the Americas, December 10, 1994, by President Clinton and all seven Central American Heads of the Alliance, focusing specially on protecting the region's rich biodiversity, strengthening environmental legislation, expanding renewable energy and promoting more open trade.

The Central American Commission for Environmental and Development (CCAD) is the regional entity authorized by the Central American governments to establish and promote a common regional environmental agenda. Constituted in 1989, and supported actively by USAID since its inception, the CCAD is essentially the council of the seven national ministries of environment and natural resources. The principal mandate of the CCAD is the development and consolidation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC). The MBC is envisioned, as a regional land-use system comprised of national and transboundary protected areas and interconnecting buffer and multi-use zones that can contribute to the improved quality of life for Central American citizens by providing environmental goods and services to Central American society and promoting investment in conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

### **2. USG Assistance**

A comprehensive series of ongoing and integrated efforts are being by the U.S. and Central American government, working together with other international donors under the CCAD, to significantly advance the state of biodiversity conservation and environmental legislation in Central America in fulfillment of their respective commitments contained in the CONCAUSA accord.

The most notable joint initiative is the five year, \$25 million **Regional Environmental Program for Central America (PROARCA)**, designed specially in response to CONCAUSA, in which USAID provides strategic support to the Alliance through a major agreement with the CCAD. Under the Strategic Objective "Increased

Effectiveness in Regional Stewardship of the Environmental and Natural Resources in Target Areas" specific results are being achieved in the 1) Improved Consolidation of the Central American Protected Areas System, 2) Increased Local Empowerment for Stewardship of the Environment and Natural Resources in Target Areas, 3) Central American Environmental Policy Frameworks Harmonized and Strengthened Operationally throughout the isthmus, agreements between USAID and U S PVOs are improving terrestrial and coastal resources management and promoting municipal empowerment. A USAID/EPA agreement provides technical assistance and training in pollution and environmental legislation.

These programs coordinate closely with the PROARCA/CCAD Biodiversity and Environmental Legislation programs that provide direction and demand-driven training and technical assistance to government institutions and NGOs throughout the region. PROARCA complements USAID Bilateral Mission environment and natural resources management programs in five of the seven Central American countries. In addition, USAID/Washington and other United States government institutions, including the Department of the Interior, U S Forest Service and NASA, are providing key information and technical assistance, usually in conjunction with the aforementioned USAID regional and bilateral initiatives.

Among the significant USAID-supported regional environmental achievements to-date are the ratification by the Central American nations of major regional and international biodiversity agreements, and the adoption by several countries of new strengthened environmental legislation and regulations.

### **3. Issues**

***The CCAD transition.*** The operational arm of the CCAD is its Executive Secretariat, based in Guatemala City since its founding. In July 1997 the C A Heads of State decreed the structural and geographical unification of the regional secretariats for environmental, social and economic concerns under the Secretariat for Central American Integration based in San Salvador, El Salvador. Since late 1998 the CCAD is undergoing a major transition that includes a new Executive Secretary and the transfer of PROARCA/CCAD program has thus far not been affected.

***Post-Mitch environmental program.*** USAID and CCAD propose to undertake a program of environmentally-sound land use planning and management, and targeted environmental restoration in Central America, focusing on areas that were devastated by the effects on Hurricane Mitch in October/November 1998. This program will support the official Central American mandate to the CCAD to lead international efforts to "reduce the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters". Thematic areas include watersheds, coastal zones and reforestation.